

Adventure Cyclist reviews Co-Motion's Nor'Wester

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Photo is not from the original review

Road Test: Co-Motion Nor'Wester Co-Pilot

From suitcase to great bike in minutes
By John Schubert

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Some years back, Co-Motion introduced its Americano touring bike, for people who wanted the most rugged bike possible. Built like the front half of a tandem, and available with [heavy duty] wheels, it was the ideal steed for heavy riders, rugged terrain, and an unforgiving attitude towards any equipment problems. Co-Motion listens intently to customer feedback, and here's the feedback it got: the Americano was just overkill for many riders' desires. And so Co-Motion introduced the Nor'Wester, which is plenty rugged enough for any touring I've ever done, but not as extreme as the Americano.

It offers a sensible design, and one that will neatly meet the needs of most touring cyclists.

Co-Motion makes hand-built welded-steel bikes, which are not inexpensive, but are quite successful in their market niche. The combination of flawless workmanship, friendly telephone manners, and customization upon request has earned them a loyal following,

and in the tandem market, they are regarded as one of the top high-end brands.

Many Co-Motion customers prefer their bikes with S&S couplers (first reviewed by us in the August 1995 issue of Adventure Cyclist).

The bike I tested had S&S couplers. The idea is simple: the frame comes apart into two pieces, and then the entire bike easily fits into a carry bag or case that you can check as regular luggage on an airplane,

Several bikes with S&S couplers have passed through my hands now, and my respect for this technology has only grown. So when the couplers are assembled and tightened, your bike is as solid as if it didn't have the couplers; and they only add a few ounces in weight.

What may surprise you is how easily the bike switches from luggage to bicycle and back again. If you're moderately competent, you'll learn to do it in about fifteen minutes, and yes, all the pieces fit into the carry bag surprisingly easily.

The disassembly for packing is quite straightforward. You remove both wheels, the seat and post, the pedals, and the handlebars. You unscrew the cable splitters, uncouple the couplers, and the frame is in two pieces. Protective sleeves slide over the frame tubes, and everything fits into the carry bag like the instructions say it will.

The Nor'Wester in its carry bag weighs around thirty pounds, and there's enough extra space in the bag to stash some tools, extra clothes, and maybe even a pannier rack. The bag is a canvas suitcase style, with plastic stiffeners inside. The up-charge for the coupler system is \$465.00, and if you fly commercial airlines with your bike regularly, you'll recover that up-charge in avoided bicycle fees.

On the road, the Nor'Wester has the easy manners that a touring bike should have. If one were to study the [spec sheet](#) and split hairs, one would note that the riding qualities are biased towards stable and easy to control, by dint of the slightly low bottom bracket height (10 1/2 inches) and the slightly large trail dimension (2 5/8 inches). But "stable" is not a code word for sluggish. The bike's handling feels neutral. I quickly forgot I was riding a new bike, and I handled it as if I'd owned it for years.

Of course, the Nor'Wester has mounting bosses for front and rear panniers racks, three water bottles, and fenders. The Continental 700C X 32 tires are fine, but if you want wider tires, the frame has clearance for them.

The components on our test bike are top notch, as befits a truly hand-built bike. The DT hubs, Race Face crankset, American Classic seat post and Chris King headset are beyond what most manufacturers offer. It's what you get when you enter that next price category. At \$3,540, this bike isn't cheap. It's a touring cyclist's luxury. It cost what it costs because it's handmade in Eugene, Oregon. The ability to order a bike just the way you want it and talk directly to the people who build it comes at a price.

The workmanship on this bike is another luxury. The welds are beyond clean. A well-executed curve in the seat stays looks really cool. The paint is flawless and the

all-important S&S couplers are beautifully integrated into the frame.

The Nor'Wester is sold with your choice of two component groups. We selected the loaded touring group with cantilever brakes. The racier component group has sidepull brakes and costs \$20 more with two chainwheels, or \$75 more with three chainwheels.

One thing to keep in mind is that Co-Motion can and does make changes to suit individual need. If the Nor'Wester is almost what you want but it needs a particular change, you should call and ask.

For Current pricing and specifications click [here](#).

For more information, visit; [Co-Motion Cycles](#) or [S & S Machine](#).

To request our printed catalog or correspond by email, click [here](#).